

The Lies of 'No Other Land'

written by Lahav Harkov | 04.03.2025

"No Other Land" won Best Documentary Feature Film at the Academy Awards on Monday. The film follows one of its directors, Basel Adra, as his village Masafer Yatta, near Hebron, is set to be demolished by the IDF.

The film is partly made up of videos that Masafer Yatta residents collected over the course of 20 years, and is in part about the growing friendship between Adra and another director of the film, an Israeli journalist named Yuval Avraham. The film depicts most Israelis and the IDF as unnecessarily cruel and violent, while presenting Palestinian violence against Israelis as justified resistance.

Adra and Avraham claimed in their acceptance speeches that Israel is an apartheid state that is ethnically cleansing Palestinians and starving the residents of Gaza. It is unsurprising that they would blatantly lie on the Oscars stage, because their film is based on a long list of falsehoods.

The residents of Masafer Yatta have claimed that it is a village with deep, longstanding roots. But the truth is that it is an invention of the past quarter-century, built illegally on land that was designated as remaining under Israeli control in the Oslo Accords, an agreement signed by the Palestinian leadership.

Before 1980, caves in the Masafer Yatta area were used by Arab shepherds residing in nearby towns as a seasonal refuge during rainy winters, but not as a full-fledged village. The Ottoman Empire, British Mandate and Jordanian occupation declared the land uninhabited, and aerial photo evidence backs up the claim.

In 1980 and 1981, Israel designated different parts of the Masafer Yatta area a live-fire training zone and declared it state land. The IDF gave Arab shepherds from the nearby town of Yatta grazing access during breaks in training, usually on the weekends and Jewish holidays, and during specific annual grazing periods.

In 1995, as part of the Oslo Accords, Masafer Yatta was designated as part of Area C, over which Israel has military and civil control - meaning that any construction in the area required permits from the Israeli authorities. Between 1981 and 1999, Palestinians illegally built dozens of structures in Masafer Yatta,

which the IDF repeatedly demolished.

When Israel once again sought to demolish structures in 1999, a legal battle began that lasted for over two decades. The first petition by Palestinians to the Israeli High Court of Justice against Israeli action in the village was submitted in 2000, bringing about an injunction stopping the IDF from training in most of the area and from razing the village for 12 years.

The injunction was also meant to stop building by the area's Arab residents, yet, during those 12 years, illegal construction continued in Masafer Yatta. The Association for Civil Rights in Israel, representing the village's residents, petitioned the High Court to require Israel to legalize the structures and cancel the area's firing zone status.

Subsequently, about a dozen more residential clusters, which the Palestinians called villages, plus schools, mosques, roads and more, were illegally built in the firing zone on Israeli state land. Adra's family owns an illegal gas station in the area, shown in the film. Some of the structures in the Masafer Yatta area were built with funding from the European Union, which blatantly disregarded the land's status under the Oslo Accords as under Israeli control.

In 2022, the High Court finally rejected the petition from Masafer Yatta's residents. The judges accused the petitioners of violating the injunction by continuing to build up the area over the previous 22 years. In addition, the court pointed out that many of the appellants owned homes in nearby Yatta.

The judges cited aerial photos from before Israel declared the area a firing zone as evidence that there were no permanent residences in Masafer Yatta before 1980, and that the Israeli Air Force was able to conduct live-fire exercises in the area until 1993.

Judge David Mintz said in his ruling in 2022 that "at the core of the dispute between the sides is the appellants' claim that there was a traditional agricultural settlement with public and residential villages established in this place, despite the declaration of a firing zone as a closed military zone, are a direct continuation of that traditional settlement... The appellants were unable to prove their claim of permanent residence before the declaration of a firing zone."

Citing photos and documents provided by the state, Mintz added: "The clear

conclusion arising from all of the materials put before us is that on the eve of the declaration of a firing zone, there were no permanent residences within its borders.”

“No Other Land” does not mention any of this. As far as the filmmakers are concerned, the Israelis want to throw the poor Palestinians off of their land out of bloodlust, racism or greed. Anyone watching the film without prior knowledge comes away thinking there is no legitimate Israeli claim and there is no agreement to which the Palestinians’ own government is a party.

One may feel sympathy for Adra, who lived in Masafer Yatta most of his life and is now raising a family of his own in the area, and may face the demolition of his home. His film certainly makes apparent the challenges he and his neighbors face. Yet, while Adra did not choose where his family would live when he was a child, he is now the tip of the spear of over two decades of propaganda based on lies about victimhood and indigeneity.

The trailer for “No Other Land” claims that “Masafer Yatta exists for one reason: people who hold onto life.” Yet, no amount of glitzy Hollywood events and awards can change the facts. There is a preponderance of evidence that Masafer Yatta is a relatively recent invention built upon by activists, NGOs and eventually foreign governments who have used it as a battering ram against Israel. This has allowed them to claim, as the website for “No Other Land” does, that they are acting in “resistance to apartheid.” In reality, they are playing the victim while squatting and demonizing Israel.